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Testimony of Rochelle Palache, District Director, SEIU 32BJ

Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee:

Testimony IN SUPPORT of House Bill No. 6578 - An Act Concerning Participation in the Electoral Process; and IN SUPPORT of Senate Bill No. 1017- An Act Concerning Election Administration

March 9, 2021

Dear Senator Mae Flexer (Co-Chair), Representative Dan Fox (Co-Chair), Senator Rob Sampson (Ranking Member), Representative Gale Mastrofrancesco (Ranking Member) and members of the Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today.

My name is Rochelle Palache and I am the Connecticut State Director of SEIU 32BJ. 32BJ represents over 4,500 men and women in the state of Connecticut and 175,000 members up and down the East Coast. Our members form the backbone of the property services industry- building workers, security officers; and office, school, theater, stadium and window cleaners.

Passing HB 6578, but with needed improvement, is very important to our members because it will expand Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) beyond the Dept. of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to other state agencies. This is a common-sense reform that saves taxpayer money and helps increase democratic participation.

This bill codifies AVR, as it is happening now at the Dept. of Motor Vehicles, into state law and I applaud that first step. However we must also expand AVR to the Dept. of Social Services (DSS), HUSKY, Access Health CT, state colleges and universities and other state agencies. This is important to many of our members who do not interact with the DMV, do interact with these other agencies, and they deserve the same opportunity to register as others..

77% of Connecticut voters support Automatic Voter Registration in a recent Secure Democracy public opinion poll. Across the country, localities have saved an average of about \$3.54 in labor costs per registration by moving from a paper to an electronic method. Nineteen states have versions of AVR.

Restoring the right to vote to people re-entering their communities on parole is also extremely important to me because disenfranchising people on parole sustains a racist system of inequality in our state. Those on parole are concentrated in only a handful of Connecticut communities—those with significant populations of Black and Latino people.

Connecticut has the most stringent criminal disenfranchisement laws in the Northeast and it is the only state in the region that still prohibits those on parole from casting a ballot. Furthermore, felony disenfranchisement laws became widespread in the United States after the Civil War as a way for former Confederate states to circumvent Reconstruction amendments and stamp out Black political power. 20 states allow people on parole to vote and just two weeks ago New York's state senate voted to restore voting rights to those on parole.

Preventing formerly incarcerated people from voting undermines good-faith attempts at reintegration, and artificially decreases the voting power of the communities in which people on parole reside.

Lastly, passing SB 1017 is also absolutely necessary so that voters currently qualifying to vote absentee retain the freedom they had in 2020 to use their town's official, secure ballot drop boxes.

We ask that you stand with our state's working families by passing HB 6578 but with expansion of Automatic Voter Registration beyond the Dept. of Motor Vehicles to other state agencies—and I urge you to pass SB 1017.